



64.1995.1 Iron Brigade
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Marker Text

Composed of infantry regiments from Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan, the Iron Brigade fought with Army of the Potomac during the Civil War (1861-1865). Received name for valor at battle of South Mountain, Maryland (1862). Sustained combat fatalities among the highest in the Union armies.

Review

The Bureau placed this marker under review because its file lacked both primary and secondary source documentation. IHB researchers were able to find primary sources to support the claims made by the marker except for the statement “sustained combat fatalities among the highest in the Union armies.” The following report expands on the marker points and addresses various omissions, including the brigade’s other battlefield experience, the story behind their naming, the combat fatalities that eventually heralded the end of the Midwestern identity of the Iron Brigade, and the reasoning behind the marker’s placement in Porter County.

After the start of the [Civil War](#) in April 1861, four western regiments – the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiments, and the 19th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment – were brigaded together under the command of [Brigadier General Rufus King](#).¹ The brigade was assigned to the [Army of the Potomac](#), but did not participate in all of that army’s major battles; King’s brigade was one of those detached from the army before the [Peninsula Campaign](#) in April 1862.²

On May 7, 1862, army command assigned [Brigadier General John Gibbon](#) command of this brigade.³ According to military historian Alan Gaff, General Gibbon worked to make his men look like soldiers. Volunteer uniforms varied widely among the four regiments and even among men in the same regiment. To rectify the issue, Gibbon ordered the [quartermaster](#) to issue the brigade regular army uniforms. Because of this shift in attire, both friend and foe quickly recognized the men of Gibbon’s western Brigade; they became known as the ‘black hat brigade’ or the ‘big hat brigade.’⁴

The black hat brigade rejoined the Army of the Potomac during the [Second Battle of Bull Run](#) on August 28-30, 1862 in Virginia.⁵ They fought well in spite of the Confederate victory.⁶ Gibbon’s men next faced the Confederates at [South Mountain](#) in Maryland on September 14, 1862.⁷ The brigade withstood the rebels’ attacks bravely and despite heavy losses.⁸ According to historian Alan Nolan, [Major General George McClellan](#) and [Major General Joseph Hooker](#) praised their efforts and they were referred to as ‘men of iron’.⁹ On September 27, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* published an article referring to the regiments as the Iron Brigade.¹⁰ The newly nicknamed



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brigade fought again at the [Battle of Antietam](#) in Maryland on September 17, 1862, where they fought well in spite of the massive casualties and lack of a clear victor.¹¹

Two major organizational changes occurred within the brigade in the fall of 1862: the addition of a new regiment and a new commander. On October 8, 1862, the 24th Michigan Volunteers joined the Iron Brigade.¹² Nolan argues that while the Iron Brigade appreciated these new men because of the additional man power they represented, the veterans remained skeptical that the new regiment would live up to the brigade's battle-tested reputation.¹³ On November 26, 1862, [Brigadier General Solomon Meredith](#) was assigned command of the brigade.¹⁴

The 24th Michigan were soon given a chance to prove their worth; the Iron Brigade fought with the Army of the Potomac in the battles at [Fredericksburg](#) in Maryland on December 11-15, 1862, and [Chancellorsville](#) in Virginia on April 30-May 6, 1863.¹⁵ In Pennsylvania on July 1-3, 1863, the Iron Brigade suffered massive casualties during the [Battle of Gettysburg](#).¹⁶

As a result of these casualties, the essential western nature of the Iron Brigade was forever altered; on July 13, 1863, the 167th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry was ordered to join the brigade to reinforce its depleted numbers.¹⁷ Thereafter, a number of other eastern regiments were brigaded with the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin, 19th Indiana, and 24th Michigan in order to augment their numbers. Nolan made a careful study of these additions and notes that eight different regiments joined the brigade between July 31, 1863 and April 30, 1865.¹⁸ The original regiments of the Iron Brigade continued to fight with the Army of the Potomac through the end of the war; brigade badges created for reunions after the conflict cite their participation in the Army's battles beyond Gettysburg, such as [the Wilderness](#), [Spotsylvania Court House](#), [Cold Harbor](#), [Petersburg](#), and [Appomattox Court House](#) (though it is important to note that these same badges do not credit the participation of the other regiments brigaded with the original Iron Brigade after Gettysburg – they were not invited to participate in the reunions).¹⁹ The formal dissolution of the brigade came on July 1, 1865.²⁰

IHB now avoids the use of subjective and superlative terms such as “first,” “best,” and “most.” Such claims are often not verifiable and/or require extensive qualification to be truly accurate. That is the case with this marker's claim that the Iron Brigade “sustained combat fatalities among the highest in the Union armies.” While it is clear from accounts at the time that the Iron Brigade suffered heavy fatalities, it is very difficult to determine whether these figures are “among the highest in the Union armies.”²¹ Additionally, Civil War historians currently make use of the more encompassing term ‘casualties’ to discuss those killed, wounded, and captured or missing during the Civil War; this term would be better employed in this phrase than the current “fatalities” for this reason.²²

It seems unlikely that any of the men in the 19th Indiana hailed from Porter county; why, then, is the marker located in the county?²³ When the marker was placed in 1995, US highway 12 was



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simultaneously designated the Iron Brigade Highway because it runs through Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan. However, the Indiana Department of Transportation decided that it was too unsafe to have visitors stopping along US 12 to view the marker. Additionally, there were plans to reroute US 12 onto US 20, just a few miles south, when the Indiana Dunes Lakeshore absorbed part of US 12 into the park system. So, for reasons of safety and highway maintenance, the marker was placed on US 20 in Porter County.²⁴

For Further Information

- [19th Indiana Infantry Regiment regimental history, letters, diaries, and records](#) at the Indiana Historical Society.
- William J. K. Beaudot and Lance J. Herdegen, *An Irishman in the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Memoirs of James P. Sullivan, Sergt., Company K, 6th Wisconsin Volunteers* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1993).
- Craig L. Dunn, *Iron Men, Iron Will: The Nineteenth Indiana Regiment of the Iron Brigade* (Indianapolis, IN: Guild Press of Indiana, Inc., 1995).
- Alan D. Gaff, *On Many a Bloody Field: Four Years in the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).
- John Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928).
- Lance Herdegen, *The Men Stood Like Iron: How the Iron Brigade Won It's Name* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).
- Lance Herdegen and Sherry Murphy, eds., *Four Years with the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Journals of William R. Ray, Co. F., Seventh Wisconsin Infantry* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).
- Dennis S. Lavery and Mark H. Jordan, *Iron Brigade General: John Gibbon, A Rebel in Blue* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1993).
- Martin Kent and Donna E. Lusitana. [Born Killers: The Iron Brigade](#) (New York, NY: A&E Television Networks, 1999).
- Alan T. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade: A Military History* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975).
- Alan T. Nolan and Sharon Eggleston Vipond, eds., *Giants in Their Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).
- William Thomas Venner, *Hoosier's Honor: The Iron Brigade's 19th Indiana Regiment* (Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street Press, 1998).

¹ "Return of Casualties on the Union forces, commanded by Maj. Gen. John Pope, during the operations August 16-September 2, 1862, inclusive – continued," *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* series 1, volume 12, part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885),



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254; Charles E. Estabrook, ed., *Annual Reports of the Adjutant General of the State of Wisconsin for the Years 1860, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864* (Madison, WI: Democrat Printing Co., 1912), 262-264, accessed [Google Books](#).

² "Troops of the Army of the Potomac sent to the Peninsula in March and early April, 1862," *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 19-21, accessed [Making of America](#).

³ "Special Orders No. 46," May 7, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion Armies* series 1, volume 51, part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 605, accessed [Making of America](#); John Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 26-27.

⁴ Alan D. Gaff, *On Many a Bloody Field: Four Years in the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 127-128; Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War*, 93. According to Gaff, the uniform consisted of: a black [Hardee hat](#), a blue dress coat, blue jacket, woolen shirt, light blue wool pants, underwear, stockings, white leggings, and shoes, along with other accoutrements. As articles of clothing wore out, the quartermaster continued to supply Gibbon's brigade with Hardee hats and dress coats, even though other volunteer regiments received [kepi hats](#) and jackets.

⁵ John Gibbon, "Reports of Brig. Gen. John Gibbon, U.S. Army, commanding Fourth Brigade, of engagement near Gainsville and Battle of Bull Run," September 3, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 12, part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 377-378, accessed [Making of America](#).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John Gibbon, "Reports of Brig. Gen. John Gibbon, U.S. Army, commanding Fourth Brigade, of the battles of South Mountain and Antietam," September 20, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 19, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 247-248, accessed [Making of America](#).

⁸ George B. McClellan, "Report of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, U.S. Army, commanding the Army of the Potomac, of operations August 14-November 9," October 15, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 19, part 1, 52, accessed [Making of America](#).

⁹ Alan T. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade: A Military History* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975), 130 [50]. Nolan presents a fulsome discussion of the topic. He argues that while the story of the brigade's naming is too good to be true, other sources from the time verify some of the basic facts.

¹⁰ "A Shell Among the Wisconsin Sixth – The Iron Brigade," *Milwaukee Sentinel* 19: 232, September 27, 1862, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#). This article is internally dated September 25, 1862, which means someone referred to these regiments as the Iron Brigade as early as 11 days after the battle of South Mountain.

¹¹ John Gibbon, "Reports of Brig. Gen. John Gibbon, U.S. Army, commanding Fourth Brigade, of the battles of South Mountain and Antietam," September 20, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 19, part 1, 248-249, accessed [Making of America](#).

¹² "Special Orders No. 24," October 8, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 51, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 877, accessed [Making of America](#).



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- ¹³ "The Iron Brigade," *The Wisconsin State Register*, April 25, 1863, 1, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#); Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 159-161.
- ¹⁴ Special Orders No. 62," *War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 51, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 951, accessed [Making of America](#). See the Bureau's [Iron Brigade Commander marker \(89.1963.1\)](#) for more information about General Meredith.
- ¹⁵ Solomon Meredith, "Report of Brig. Gen. Solomon Meredith, U.S. Army, commanding Fourth Brigade," December 22, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 21 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 475-477, accessed [Making of America](#); Lysander Cutler, "Report of Col. Lysander Cutler, Sixth Wisconsin Infantry, commanding Fourth Brigade," December 17, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 21, 478-479, accessed [Making of America](#); Solomon Meredith, "Report of Brig. Gen. Solomon Meredith, U.S. Army, commanding Fourth Brigade," May 28, 1863, *The War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 25, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 266-268, accessed [Making of America](#).
- ¹⁶ Abner Doubleday, "Reports of Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday, U.S. Army, commanding Third Division of, and First Army Corps," December 14, 1863, *War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 27, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 254, accessed [Making of America](#); "Return of Casualties in the Union forces, commanded by Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, U.S. Army, at the battle of Gettysburg, Pa., July 1-3, 1863," *War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 27, part 1, 173, accessed [Making of America](#); William W. Dudley, *The Iron Brigade at Gettysburg: Official Report of the Part Borne by the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 1st Army Corps Army of the Potomac in the Action at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 1863* (Cincinnati, OH, 1879).
- ¹⁷ S. Williams to Col. E. Schriver, Commanding at Frederick, July 13, 1863, *War of the Rebellion* series 1, volume 27, part 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 674-675, accessed [Making of America](#).
- ¹⁸ Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 264 [5] [Note: This citation extensively lists instances in *War of the Rebellion* where other regiments were brigaded with the Iron Brigade after Gettysburg].
- ¹⁹ "Iron Brigade – Description of the Badge Made for the Heroes of Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan," *The Wisconsin State Register*, March 14, 1874, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#).
- ²⁰ Leslie J. Parry, "Dissolution of the Iron Brigade," July 1, 1865, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 7, 1865, 1, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#).
- ²¹ "The 'Iron Brigade,'" *The Wisconsin State Register*, July 18, 1863, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#); "The Record of the 'Iron Brigade,'" *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* 10: 229, September 23, 1863, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#); "The Iron Brigade – Interesting Statistics," *The Wisconsin State Register* 3: 31, October 17, 1863, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#); "The Iron Brigade," *The Wisconsin State Register* 3: 50, February 27, 1864, 1 accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#); "The Iron Brigade," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 29, 1889, 1, accessed [Gale's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers](#).
- ²² Civil War Trust, "Civil War Casualties: The Cost of War – Killed, Wounded, Captured, and Missing," <http://www.civilwar.org/education/civil-war-casualties.html>.
- ²³ Indiana Antietam Monument Commission, *Indiana at Antietam* (Indianapolis, IN: The Aetna Press, 1911), 107, accessed [Google Books](#); David Stevenson, *Indiana's Roll of Honor* 1 (Indianapolis, IN: H. H. Dodd & Co., 1864), 347-348, accessed [Google Books](#). It is unlikely, though not impossible, that there were any men from Porter county



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serving with the 19th Indiana. The regiment was raised in Delaware, Elkhart, Johnson, Madison, Marion, Owen, Randolph, and Wayne counties.

²⁴ Information on the placement of the marker from IHB Admin File 64.1995.1.